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Antizionism: The Reinvention of a Racist Hate Movement

Antizionism is the latest chilling form of supersecessionism — the impulse to eliminate Jews to redeem the world.

By Kathleen Hayes

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"Tell me what you accuse the Jews of — I'll tell you what you're guilty of."

This 1959 observation by novelist Vasily Grossman, often quoted by writer Douglas Murray, was vividly illustrated at UCLA last week. An ignominious band of university departments including its School of Law sponsored a talk by Rutgers professor Noura Erakat — an activist posing as a scholar — who teaches the gullible that Israel is a settler colonial project. Erakat's faux lecture, "Revisiting Zionism as a Form of Racism and Racial Discrimination," was timed to honor the fiftieth anniversary of U.N. General Assembly Resolution 3379 — the since-rescinded-but-never-dead screed that declared Zionism a form of racism.

Judea Pearl, UCLA professor, Turing Prize winner and proud Israel-born Zionist, had had enough. When he learned of the "Zionism is racism" lecture, he issued a call for a countervailing event on campus the same night, Nov. 13. UCLA's Jewish Faculty Resilience Group swung into gear, and in little over a week about a hundred people gathered at UCLA's School of Law for a panel discussion called "Is Antizionism Racism?" Peter Savodnik of The Free Press was a thoughtful moderator, and Michael Berenbaum, Yael Lerman and Hindi Stohl Posy gave sobering, alarming, or stirring presentations. Presumably due to the imposing police presence (thank you, UCPD), antizionist protesters mostly stayed away. At least one professor in the audience felt secure enough from the keffiyeh brigade to pull out her knitting.

As Professor Pearl reported the next day on X, the event was a major success. "Two concrete outcomes became immediately evident," he wrote. "(1) Zionist faculty and students at UCLA will now be asserting their right to a name, a voice and institutional representation on campus. (2) Antizionist faculty and students will now be facing a new, no-nonsense environment in which their rhetoric and ideology are exposed — and named — for what they are: racist."

Because what else can you call a movement that exists solely to deny the right of self-determination to one nation — the Jewish one? That

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That champions an organization, Hamas, whose founding charter calls to kill Jews? That celebrates as "resistance" the largest one-day slaughter of Jews since the Holocaust?

Jew-haters invariably ascribe to Jews whatever they find most abhorrent. For the Nazis who obsessed about race purity, Jews were polluters of the Aryan race. Medieval Christians hated Jews as the supposed killers of Christ. For communists, Jews were capitalists; and for reactionaries, Jews were communists. Today, when society overwhelmingly rejects racism, progressives who consider it the worst of all crimes scream "Racist!" at Jews who support the existence of a Jewish state. Meanwhile they support the elimination of that same state, making their claim the epitome of projection.

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It has become counterproductive to insist that "antizionism is antisemitism." Jew-hatred is, above all, a shape-shifting pathology. When antizionists insist they're not antisemitic, in a sense they're telling the truth. They're usually not antisemitic in the classical sense — they don't consciously hate Jews, and they simply adore Jews who peddle their party line. They've moved on to the next, even more noxious and dangerous form of Jew-hatred: antizionism.

More dangerous because it so effectively cloaks itself in righteousness. Because it's hoodwinked vast swathes of respectable society, from academia to flagship media to countless seemingly noble, progressive groups and institutions, into believing that the Jewish state is singularly bloodthirsty and malign. Because it goes far beyond criticizing Israel — which might seem an innocuous if strange hobby — to calling for it to be obliterated for the salvation of mankind. As they themselves explain, seemingly unaware they refer to a people comprising 0.2% of the world's population: "Zionism is a threat to humanity."

Antizionism is the latest chilling form of supersecessionism — the impulse to eliminate Jews to redeem the world. In the Middle Ages, Jew-haters disguised as pious Christians murdered Jews for the sake of uniting Christendom. In the 20th century, Jew-haters murdered Jews with the aim of ushering in a glorious Third Reich. Now Jew-haters insist that building a better world requires annihilating Israel and marginalizing those who defend its right to exist.

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And there's little point in earnestly explaining what Zionism is in the hope that antizionists recant. They are drunk on the wine of righteousness, and obsessed with a phantom having nothing to do with actual Zionism. Their movement thrives on lies that spread like forest fires, against an enemy whose very humanity is denied.

Professor Pearl recognized years ago how pointless it is to charge antizionists with antisemitism, given that the latter easily dismiss the charges by saying, "I am a Semite too!" or "Don't conflate anti-Zionism with antisemitism" or "Some of our board members are Jewish." Moreover, he points out, university administrators turn the charge of antisemitism into a license for inaction, as it permits them to appoint task forces that sit for years and philosophize on the nature of antisemitism, rather than deal directly with campus hostilities and attempts to purge Zionists from campus life.

"We will continue to lose," he wrote in 2018, "unless we assert our moral stature clearly, unabashedly and effectively by using the magic word 'Zionophobia' — the irrational fear of Zionism coupled with an obsessive commitment to undermine the right of Israel to exist. We do not have another word that describes the moral pathology of those who deny us statehood or even peoplehood."

In conversation with the Jewish Journal, Professor Pearl said: "My argument with Erakat is more personal. She wants me purged from this campus — along with some 400 other professors who share the noble Zionist aspiration for Jewish self-determination. We intend to remain here, on our campus, and we call her position racist in the first degree: Any activity that demeans, defames, or invalidates the core identity of a group of faculty or students is racist — and has no place in a university."

Many of us have wasted too much time fighting antisemitism without recognizing that Jew-hatred has mutated into a much more resilient virus. It now targets Jews not as individuals, but as a people. And it must be fought with all the strength, clarity and moral force we have.

Kathleen Hayes *is the author of "Antisemitism and the Left: A Memoir."*

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